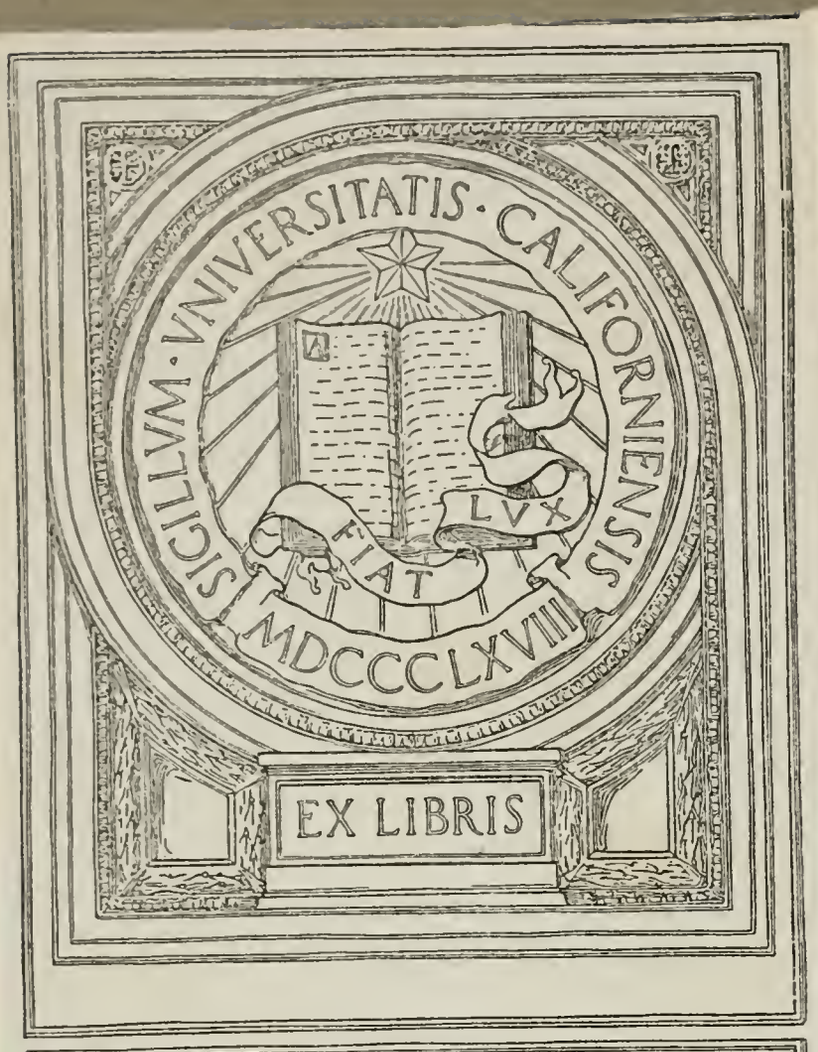
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BRONSON ALCOTT



BRONSON ALCOTT

From a medallion of Seth Cheney, made about 1854, when Alcott was 55 years old.

BRONSON ALCOTT

AT ALCOTT HOUSE, ENGLAND, AND FRUITLANDS, NEW ENGLAND (1842-1844)

BY F. B. SANBORN
CONCORD, MASS.



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TO VIEW
ANNOTATIONS

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At Alcott House, England, and Fruitlands, New England (1842-1844)

PRELIMINARY

In the whole career of eminent men, it is often only at one or two points that the imagination of the public is specially aroused. Thus Socrates had a long and varied career as citizen, soldier, "gadfly of the Athenians" (as he styled himself), and conversing sage; but the point upon which the gaze of the world is fixed is that closing scene of his plea at the trial, and his last conversation in the prison. Thoreau was a student, mechanic, land-surveyor, and lecturer for more than thirty years; but the public has determined to be more interested in the two or three years spent by him in his Walden hut, than in the rest of his busy life. George

Ripley was a pastor, a polemic, a translator, and for many years the scholarly critic in a great newspaper office (the *Tribune*) of New York; but his Brook Farm experiment in the art of living in a Community is the one thing that will not be forgotten in his busy years, and is continually the subject of new inquiries. So, too, with Bronson Alcott. He lived to his 89th year; he stood before the public in many capacities; but the one point of curiosity now, as during that half century which followed the giving up of his Fruitlands monastery in January, 1844, is the brief history of that Arcadian episode in his patriarchal existence. To that, and to what immediately preceded and followed that, I can therefore best devote the pages of this monograph, designed especially for the dwellers in that broad midland area of our common country which, in 1840-44, (the *Dial* period) was hardly inhabited at all, save by the roving Indian and his big game, the buffalo.

THE HOSMER COTTAGE

In the spring of 1840 Mr. Alcott, reduced to penury by the failure of his Temple School in Boston, had removed to the Hosmer Cottage in Concord, on the estate, and near the great farmhouse of Joseph Hosmer, Major and High Sheriff, which he had built in 1764, just before his youthful pastor, Rev. William Emerson, had built the Old Manse, at the other end of the straggling village, near the old North Bridge, as Major Hosmer's was equally near the old South Bridge of the town. The Major had been dead a few years, but the homestead remained in the family, and a few rods west of it stood the Cottage, then unoccupied, which had sheltered a relative or a tenant of the Hosmers. The Alcotts hired it at a low rent ($52 a year), and there the artist-daughter, May, was born in the following July. The father occupied himself with whatever rural labor he could find to do for hire, and the household was carried on with strict economy, yet al-

ways with a kindly regard to those poorer than the Alcotts themselves then were. A picture from the life of this household, when May Alcott was an infant, was drawn by Miss Robie, of Boston, a cousin of Mrs. Alcott, writing from this Hosmer Cottage, December 6, 1841, as follows:

As it was time for me to expect a headache, I did not dare to go to Concord without carrying tea and coffee and cayenne pepper, — and a small piece of cooked meat, in case my wayward stomach should crave it; which last article was a little piece of *a la mode* beef. Thus provided, I arrived at the Cottage just after dark of a Friday evening. I got into the house before they heard me, and found them seated around their bread and water. I had a most cordial welcome from Mrs. Alcott and the children. She said to me, "O you dear creature! you are the one I should have picked out of all the good people in Boston. How thankful I am to see you!" I had a comfortable cup of tea in a few minutes, for I did not dare to go without.

The family next opened a bundle in which were clothes for the children, etc.,

sent by the thoughtful Mrs. James Savage, of Boston, mother of two of the famous talking pupils of Mr. Alcott at the Temple School, one of whom still survives as a leader of society in that city. Miss Robie now resumes:

Mr. Alcott sat looking on like a philosopher. "There," said he, "I told you that you need not be anxious about clothing for the children; you see it has come as I said."

Mrs. Alcott wanted comfort and counsel; for, though cheerful and uncomplaining, things had got pretty low. Mr. Alcott was evidently not well, and she was quite anxious about him, and expressed some fears that the little sympathy and encouragement he received in regard to his views would depress him beyond what he could bear. However, after a good talk and a good crying spell, her spirits rallied, and all was bright again. She told me of the miserable poor woman in her neighborhood, who had just lost a drunken husband, and was in a poor hovel with four children; and she had been aiding her, in their small way, to a little meal, and encouraging her to have a good heart and keep out of the workhouse; and had interested other neighbors in her behalf. She said it

seemed as if this poor family had been brought to her notice to show her how much better her own situation was, and to give a change to her feelings by looking about, and doing what she could to assist her.

I went with her one day to see this family. In the course of the visit the woman mentioned Mr. Alcott. "I did not know he had been to see you." "Oh, yes, he was here yesterday and the day before, and sawed up some wood for me that had been sent me. I had engaged Mr. Somebody to saw it for me, and did some sewing for his wife to pay for it." Said Mrs. Alcott, "Then Mr. A's sawing it did not do you much good?" "Oh, yes, — they said they had as lief give me the money for it; so I had that to buy some meal."

Whilst I was at Mrs. Alcott's of course I saw no meat, nor butter, nor cheese, and only coarse brown sugar, bread, potatoes, apples, squash and simple puddings; of these materials were the staple for food. I was obliged to have tea occasionally; but except that, I lived as they did, for I could not have the heart or the stomach to take out my beef. Mr. Alcott thought his wife did wrong to prepare the tea for me. The Alcotts had just begun to do with two meals a day, that the children might have the pleasure of carrying, once a week, a basket of something from their humble

savings to the poor family. Now the saving must be made for themselves.

Mr. Alcott said he could not live with debt burdening them in this way; that they must live simpler still. He started up and said he would go into the woods and chop for his neighbors, and in that way get his fuel. He has since entered upon this work. They said they should give up milk. I persuaded them against this, on account of the baby. Mr. A. thought it would not hurt any of them.

THE ENGLISH MYSTICS

At this time Anna, afterwards Mrs. Pratt, was ten, Louisa nine, and Beth seven. A year later, three English persons were added to the family, — Charles Lane, then forty-two years old, his son William, ten or twelve, and Henry Gardiner Wright, twenty-eight, — all in the autumn of 1842. How and why were they there, and who were they? To answer this question we must go back a few years, and introduce the name of Pestalozzi, the Swiss reformer of education, and his English coadjutor, James Pierrepont Greaves. Of the latter, a con-

siderable biography is to be found in the *Dial*, written by Emerson, from material furnished by Alcott in 1842. Briefly, he was an Englishman, born in 1777, who at the age of forty went to reside in Switzerland with Pestalozzi, for four years, and there adopted, a few years before young Alcott did, the chief ideas of Pestalozzi, as to the training of children. Returning to England in 1825, he gradually formed a circle of mystics and reformers, in London and its vicinity, who were like himself, interested in the early instruction and training of children. Hearing from Harriet Martineau, upon her return from America in 1837, of Mr. Alcott's Temple School at Boston, and thinking more favorably of it than Miss Martineau did, Mr. Greaves opened a correspondence with the American Pestalozzi, and received from him some of his books, — Miss Peabody's *Records of a School,* and Mr. Alcott's *Conversations on the Gospels.* From these books, and from his correspondence, Mr. Greaves and his friends, William Oldham, Mrs. Chi-



JAMES PIERREPONT GREAVES
(From a wax bas-relief)



chester, Charles Lane, Heraud, and others, (of whom Mr. W. H. Harland of Hermiston, Ham Common, England, has lately written very fully and clearly) formed so high an estimate of Bronson Alcott's talents and character, that they named for him the English school they were about establishing near London, and called it "Alcott House." They also urged Mr. Alcott to visit them in England, and take part in their schemes and labors. He was well inclined to do this; and in 1842 he set sail for London, where, late in May, he received a hearty welcome from his correspondents and their circle, with the exception of Mr. Greaves, who had died earlier in the same year. Writing to his cousin, Dr. William Alcott, with whom, in early life, he had travelled in Virginia and the Carolinas, Bronson Alcott thus described the situation which he found in England:

Alcott House, Ham Common, Surrey, June 30, 1842.

I avail myself of this earliest opportunity for

sending you a small parcel of such tracts as have come to hand, during the short time that I have been on the Island, — some of which I think will interest you, and all of them serve to gratify curiosity, if not to feed the understanding. I am now at Alcott House, which is ten miles from London; where I find the principles of human culture, which have so long interested me, carried into practical operation by wise and devoted friends of education. The school was opened five years ago* and has been thus far quite successful. It consists of thirty or more children, mostly under twelve years, and some of them not more than three years of age, — all fed and lodged at the House. The strictest temperance is observed in diet and regimen. Plain bread with vegetables and fruits is their food, and water their only drink.

They bathe always before their morning lesson, and have exercises in the play-grounds, which are ample, besides cultivating the gardens of the institution. They seem very happy, and not less in the school-room than elsewhere.

Mr. Wright has more genius for teaching than

*Really not until July, 1838, as Mr. Harland shows in his accurate monograph. A lease was first taken of the property by Wright, and then the lease purchased by his friends above named. It opened with twelve pupils.

any person I have before seen; his method and temper are admirable, and all parties, from assistants, of which there are several, to the youngest child, delight in his presence and influence. He impersonates and realizes my own idea of an educator, and is the first person whom I have met that has entered into this divine art of inspiring the human clay, and moulding it into the stature and image of divinity. I am already knit to him by more than human ties, and must take him with me to America, as a coadjutor in our high vocation, or else remain with him here. But I hope to effect the first.

Britain, with all her resource and talent, is not the scene for the education of humanity: her spirit is hostile to human welfare, and her institutions averse to the largest liberty of the soul. Nor should an enterprise of such moment be endangered by the revolutions to which all things are here exposed, and which threaten, as I think, the speedy downfall of the realm.* Our freer, but yet far from freed land is the asylum, if asylum there be, for the hope of man: and there, if anywhere, is that second Eden to be planted, in which the divine seed is to bruise the head of Evil, and restore Man to his rightful communion with God, in the Paradise of Good, — where-

* This was a gloomy anticipation then, and for some years, common.

into neither the knowledge of Death nor Sin shall enter; but Life and Immortality shall then come to light, and man pluck wisdom from the tree of life alway.

The Healthian is edited here by Mr. Wright and Mr. Lane, and they are contributors to almost every reform journal in the kingdom. They are not ignorant of our labors in the United States; almost every work of any value I find in the library at Alcott House, — your own works, those of Mr. Graham* — besides foreign authors not to be found with us. I shall bring with me many works, both ancient and modern, on my return to America.

I have traversed the island but little as yet. We have a general meeting here of the friends of reform next week [July 6, 1842]; and soon after I purpose visiting Mr. Owen at Tytherly, where he is establishing a community. I find that he is more felt than any other man in England; and although his reforms are quite partial and secondary, and fail utterly of feeding the religious instincts of man, and aim only at improving his outward circumstances; yet all this is good as far as it goes, and most needful in this oppressed and starving land; so that to many he comes as a saviour from want and dependence, and is the harbinger of that spiritual Messias whose advent is near, and whose

*Dr. Graham was a vegetarian.

coming shall unloose the heavy burdens, and let oppressed humanity go free. The same state and conditions must be secured in our own country, or we too must fall to pieces, and add to the long catalogue of the world's disappointments. But our reforms are deepening year by year, and presently we shall reach the great heart of the social and physical body, and learn whence health and healing come.

I have not yet seen Miss Goeris (?) but hope to, if possible. My regards to your good wife, and confidence that you will not fail to visit Concord during my absence. My wife deserves a visit from you, — do not disappoint either of us. I shall hear from you with pleasure. Address me at Alcott House, etc. Parcels will reach me through James Munroe, sent to John Green or Wiley & Putnam, London.

Truly your friend,

A. Bronson Alcott.

Dr. Alcott (1798-1859) was then living at Dedham, and actively engaged, as for twenty years before, in writing books and pamphlets, of which he published more than one hundred. He sympathized to a certain extent with his cousin in his educational and sanitary views, and received the tribute of a

sonnet from Bronson Alcott in 1882, in that unique volume of poems, every word of which was written after the age of eighty. Here it is; but the doctor was long dead:

In Youth's glad morning, when the rising East
Glows golden with assurance of success,
And life itself's a rare continual feast,
Enjoyed the more, if meditated less, —
'Tis then that Friendship's pleasures chiefly bless,
As if without beginning, — ne'er to end:
So rich the season and so dear the friend
When thou and I went wandering, hand in hand:
Mine wert thou in our years of earliest prime,
Studious at home, or to the Southern land
Adventuring bold. Again in later time,
Thy kindly service, ever at command
Of calm discretion and abounding sense,
Prompted and showed the path to excellence.

Hardly had the "Alcott House Academy," as Carlyle called it, in writing to Alcott there, in September, 1842, reached its twentieth pupil, in course of 1838, when Mr. Greaves and its other founders were planning to invite its American godfather to its



THE GARDEN OF ALCOTT HOUSE



vegetarian shades. In 1840 it was long debated between Mr. Greaves, Westland Marston, Heraud, and others; and in 1841 Mr. Wright offered to resign his place at the head of the school if Mr. Alcott would come over and take it, — he in the meantime carrying on an infant branch of the Alcott House School. Mr. Greaves wrote in regard to this (as quoted by Mr. Harland):

> It seems to be good that you and Mr. Alcott should be brought into some relations; but what and when and how is another matter. He should be written to and simply asked if a sum of money fixed were provided for him, would he come over to this country and see what could be done? His own friends might help him something, and all that would be committed would be the money. You would be free, as you must be in all such matters, — to surrender your school to another who was not fully equal to it would not do; and to find a fit person for it would be difficult.

The final result seems to have been that Alcott's friends in New England, particularly Emerson, furnished the money for his voyage to England in May, 1842; and that

his expenses while there were met by his English inviters and their friends. No thought of the Alcott family going over seems to have been entertained by Mrs. Alcott; and, as we see by his letter to Dr. Alcott, it was not Alcott's own intention to remain in England. He was too strongly attached to his wife and children to be long separated from them; and the education of his four daughters had ever been one of his sacred duties. It was otherwise with his English friends, or some of them. Mr. Greaves regarded celibacy as a duty; Mr. Lane had made an unhappy marriage, and was separated from his wife; and young Mr. Wright had given these two patrons to understand that he would never marry. When he did secretly marry a protegée of Mrs. Chichester in 1841, it threw Mr. Greaves into a fit of despondency, and he never seems to have taken the same interest in Alcott House afterward. He wrote to William Oldham, an intimate friend, who survived all the English circle, — dying in 1879:

I wish to be no party to anything; to retire from all things, and to get those conditions about me that will let me die in peace. What can I say to Mrs. Chichester, — I who have not been permitted to know what is going forward? The last earthly thing that interested me was the Ham School, — and this is taken away. Elizabeth Hardwick has won the game; she has the odd trick, and Mr. Oldham has been fairly beaten by the young gambler. Out of two, she has made sure of one.

In fact, Mr. Greaves really died in the March following, while Alcott was making his arrangements, with the aid of Emerson, to join his correspondent in London. This marriage flurry, with the fact that Wright had incurred some debts in the management of the Ham School, no doubt made him yield more readily to Alcott's wish that he should come to America, and begin a new career there. Why Elizabeth, his wife, did not come over, is not mentioned; nor did Wright himself remain long in Concord. With all his attractive qualities, he seems to have been a restless, rather weak person, and he

did not long outlive Mr. Greaves, — dying in 1846, while Charles Lane and his son William were still in America.

Mr. Alcott's four months in England were not clouded, however, by any anticipations of the disappointments that were to come. He lived at Alcott House, or at Park Place near by, when not exploring London to buy books for the library of his New England Eden; he called on Owen, Carlyle, George Thompson, and other friends, to whom Emerson and Garrison had given him letters; and he wrote encouragingly to Mrs. Alcott, and to Emerson in Concord, who read his letters to their friends, and prepared to receive him with a hearty welcome when he should return, bringing some English enthusiasts with him. They reached Concord in October, and from that time till June 1, 1843, when the Fruitlands idyll began, Charles Lane and his son William, with Henry Wright, spent much of their time in the family of the Alcotts, at the Hosmer Cottage, where Miss Robie had, a year before, sketch-

ed so pleasingly their generous indigence. The way of life described by her was not wholly the result of poverty, but grew partly out of Alcott's strict theories of vegetarian diet, and of sanitary and moral reformation. The course of a day at the Cottage was thus described by Lane:

A DAY AT THE COTTAGE

(Letter to Junius Alcott)

(Winter of 1842-3). The weather here is very bleak, yet we are all in the enjoyment of health, including the English new-comers. Between six and seven o'clock we are up, our wood-fires are lighted; we have a cold-water sponging all over, and a rub with the coarse crash linen towel.* Dress: and perhaps a little exercise brings us at a little after seven, to breakfast, prepared by Mr. Alcott. In the double

*In a letter written a week or two earlier, to his friend Oldham, Charles Lane says that the water in his bedroom is often frozen in the morning, and that his boy William usually builds his fire. He adds that toward evening, he, C. L., sometimes runs to the village for letters, looks at the newspapers (then to be read at a small club-room) "sees Mr. Emerson or Henry Thoreau, who is deputy editor of the *Dial* just now;" and goes to a lecture now and then.

purpose of warmth and saving labor, this meal is taken round the fireplace, without plates, etc., — each having a napkin in the lap. The bread and apples and potatoes are handed round by one appointed to that office; water only is our drink. Conversation of a useful and interior kind is generally mingled with our physical increment. There being scarcely any dishes to be washed, the females can all remain, and at about eight we have a singing lesson, by the aid of the violin, and some pretty, simple songs. [The violinist was Charles Lane].

At 8:30 I return to my little chamber to write, where I enjoy much God-like quiet until the next meal. Though rather cold, from the thin roof and walls, I have yet been able to pen much, which I hope will not be found inconsistent with the great work. Mrs. Alcott proceeds to her domestic duties. Mr. A. saws and chops, provides water, bakes some days, prepares all the food, in which he tries new materials and mixtures, of a simple character.

From 10 to 12:30, study for the children — consisting of diary, reading, spelling, conversation, grammar, arithmetic, etc., etc., — as recorded in your brother's published books. The school, having been in existence nearly three months now [March 7, 1843], goes on as quietly and serenely in the teacher's absence as when he is present, and the improvement in

all the students, young and old, is quite manifest. At 12:30, dinner. Except on Sunday, when it also is taken round the fire, this meal is spread on the table, — there being generally some preparation which requires a plate, etc. At 1, I return to my chamber, and there is a general dispersion to play, read or work. At 2 P. M. Anna comes to me for French, and William for Latin. From 3 to 4, Anna, Louisa, and William have geography, drawing or geometry. Mr. Alcott thus secures an undisturbed hour or two. From 4 to 6:30, the children sew with Mrs. Alcott, or play: I write or go to the village for letters, or to Mr. Emerson's. Then at 6:30 supper at the fireplace, the same as breakfast, with conversation more prolonged; or, at 7:15 another singing lesson, followed, frequently, by a dance. At eight, bedtime for the young folks, and about an hour later, for the adults.

Thus have passed away many days, — happy to me, — and I believe none of us would now like to return to a more complicated diet of molasses, milk, butter, etc., all which are given up. The discipline we are now under is that of abstinence in the tongue and hands. We are learning to hold our peace, and to keep our hands from each other's bodies, — the ill effects of which we see upon the little baby.

This baby was May Alcott, who was then between two and three years old. At this time the English visitors had been in America nearly five months, and most of the time in Concord, then a town of less than 2,100 people, with a central village of perhaps 700 inhabitants, and a small "factory village" two miles westward, of a hundred or two. The Hosmer Cottage stood between the two villages, and near the newly-built or building Fitchburg Railroad; but in the midst of large farms, agriculture being the chief occupation of the town's people, although there was a small circle of literary men and women in the main village, or on its outskirts.

The English mystics (as Lane and Wright were called) were at first well received in Concord by the resident mystics and anti-slavery people, — of whom, in the winter of 1842-3, were Mrs. Ward, widow of a Boston Revolutionary Colonel, and her daughter, Miss Prudence Ward, who were living in the family of Henry Thoreau's



HENRY GARDINER WRIGHT



father, at the Parkman House, where the Town Library now stands. Miss Ward, whose niece was Ellen Sewall, the fair maid beloved by both Henry and John Thoreau, in writing to her brother, George Ward, in New York (Dec. 8, 1842) said:

> We find the Englishmen very agreeable; they are at Mr. Alcott's. We took tea with them at Mrs. Brooks's, and they have passed one evening here, at Mrs. Thoreau's. They and Mr. Alcott held a talk at the Marlboro Chapel in Boston, Sunday evening. Doubtless you, George, would consider them "clean daft;" for they are as like Mr. Alcott in their views as strangers from a foreign land can well be. I should like to have them locate themselves in this vicinity. It makes a pleasant variety (to say no more) to have these different thinkers near us; and we are all agreed in liking to hear Mr. Lane talk.

The similarity of opinion between Mr. Alcott and Mr. Lane was chiefly in regard to education and diet; the Englishman, in respect to land-ownership, was almost a representative of Gerard Winstanley, the head and spokesman of the English "Diggers" or

"Levelers" of 1648-54, with whom Fairfax and Cromwell had so much trouble. Winstanley wrote in 1649:

We are not against any that would have magistrates and laws to govern, as the nations of the world are governed; but for our own parts we shall need neither the one nor the other, in that nature of government. For as our land is to be in common, so our cattle are to be common, and our corn and fruits of the earth common; and are not to be bought and sold among us, but to remain a standing portion of livelihood to us and our children, without that *cheating entanglement of buying and selling*; and we shall not arrest one another. What need have we of any outward, selfish, confused laws, made to uphold the power of covetousness, when we have the righteous law written in our hearts, teaching us to walk purely in the Creation? None of those subject to this righteous law dares arrest or enslave his brother, for or about the objects of the Earth; because the Earth is made to be a common treasury of livelihood, to one equal with another, without respect of persons. . . . And this being a truth, as it is, then none ought to be lords and landlords over another; but the Earth is free to every son and daughter of mankind to live upon. . . . I am carried forth in the power of

Love to advance this business of Public Community as much as I can; and I can do no other, — the law of Love in my heart does so constrain me. By reason of which I am called fool and madman, and have many slanderous reports cast upon me, and meet with much fury from some covetous people. I hate none, I love all, I delight to see every one live comfortably; I would have nobody live in poverty, straits and sorrow.

Towards this no-government theory both Alcott and Thoreau were for a while inclined; but I do not find that they had this opinion about the injustice of land-owning, as that baronial democrat of central New York for a time did, although he was one of the largest landholders in that State, — I mean Gerrit Smith, of Peterboro, the friend and supporter of John Brown.

Emerson, who was editing the *Dial* under difficulties, and at a distance from home, (being in New York giving courses of lectures) and who depended on Thoreau, then living in his family at Concord, wrote thus to him from New York, February 10, 1843:

The *Dial* for April—what elements shall compose

it? What have you for me? What has Mr. Lane? Have you given shape to the comment on Etzler? * It was about some sentences on this matter that I made, some day, a most rude and snappish speech. I remember, but you will not — and must give the sentences as first you quote them. You must go to Mr. Lane, with my affectionate respects, and tell him that I depend on his important aid for the new number, and wish him to give us the most recent and stirring matter that he has. If (as he is a ready man) he offers us anything at once, I beg you to read it; and if you see and say decidedly that it is *good for us,* you need not send it to me. But if it is of such quality that you can less surely pronounce, you must send it to me by Harnden (expressman).

To this request Thoreau replied thus (February 20):

I have read Mr. Lane's review of Mr. Alcott's books, with copious extracts, and *can* say, (speaking for this world, and for fallen man) that it is "good for us." As they say in geology, time never fails, so I may say criticism never fails; but if I go and read

* The ultimate fate of the Etzler review, under the title of "Paradise (to be) Regained," may be seen in my "Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Friends."

elsewhere, I say it is good — far better than any notice Mr. Alcott has received, or is likely to receive from another quarter. It is, at any rate, "the other side," which Boston needs to hear. I do not send it to you, because time is precious, and because I think you would accept it after all. After speaking briefly of the fate of Goethe and Carlyle in their own countries, he says — "To Emerson in his own circle is but slowly accorded a worthy response, and Alcott almost utterly neglected," etc. I will strike out what relates to yourself, and, correcting some verbal faults, send the rest to the printer, with Lane's initials. It is frequently easy to make him more universal and attractive; to write, for instance, "universal ends" instead of "the universal end" — just as we pull open the petals of a flower with our fingers, where they are confined by its own sweets. Also, he had better not say "books designed for the nucleus of a *Home* university." This is that abominable dialect.

How much drier the article would have been had Thoreau not amended it, who can say? But as it was, it encountered the caustic humor of Channing, as will soon be seen.

Ellery Channing, the most intimate friend of Thoreau and of Hawthorne, outside their own families, was not then a resi-

dent of Concord, as Hawthorne was; but he frequently visited his friends there, while spending his first winter of married life in Cambridge. After one of these visits to Emerson, he wrote to him (Dec. 28, 1842):

> I look lingeringly towards Concord. I saw in Boston today Messrs. English Mystics, with fur caps and collars. Now then, with the blessing of God upon yourself and Elizabeth Hoar, and all other of the saints, — and my Fisherman Hawthorne, and the Forester (Thoreau), and all those rural figures who move piously among the now bare boughs of a once-populous summer foliage, I remain in all love your friend.

THE DIAL AND ITS CONTENTS

But Channing, who in the spring of 1843 went first to reside in Concord, where he remained, with a few absences, till his death in December, 1901, did not then have that regard for Alcott and his virtues which he afterwards learned to express. Channing's humor often got the better of him, as it did in one of his next letters to Emerson (April 6, 1843) when he had hired a small red cot-

tage of Sheriff Moore, near Emerson's garden, but had not yet occupied it. Channing wrote:

Now, O man of many lectures! behold that, although I have rented a shanty, yet, as it is fixt in the huge entrails of a marsh, how shall I, (one admiring dryness) fly with draggled wings into my soggy abode? Think of it, and strike, as with a blow of thunder, the Anacreontic Basque-student, Thoreau, — and let him, like Tennyson's white owl, warm his five wits in profitable conjectures about these affairs. I hear with regret that this, our man of the world, fleeing afar from his beloved woods, will no longer pick the first of the spring flowers. Alas! Yet I do believe that his voyage will be prosperous, and that his barque will sweep the foam off many a new coast, and bring home a bushel of diamonds.

I have beheld the expiring Nestor! I have seen with reverent eyes the Fourth Number of the Third Volume of the *Dial* charm with its bright surface the expectant world without watches. I have not essayed to read that Serbonic first article, by the illustrious professor of Poh (Charles Lane on Alcott). Me also, with tired breast, does all thought ejected from the Alcottian syringe drive into dejection. Such work for nothing, — such fine-drawn-gauze safety lamps, by

which all the carburetted hydrogen of society is to be forever rendered harmless! such supposed interest in what concerns only some retired gentleman who is making cucumbers of moonshine, — by all others! Alas for the unleavened bread! alas for the unleavened wit! Mr. Alcott would live by his brains; but I am sure I believe it to be true (what is said in the Bible) that man can only live by the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. That old saw, — about earning your bread by the sweat of your brow, — is always carried by a large majority.

I relish that Yankee theorem, "Eat your victuals and go about your business!" Confront the problems as we will, all human testimony says that the central nut in this bushel of Life cannot be cracked; and more, — if cracked we may get a worm for our pains. (It is the *Dial* that has thus extravasated some of the matter of my unfortunate heart). A magazine written by professed drunkards, — gentlemen who eat nothing but beef-steaks, — and believers in Original Sin, — must be the thing for me. What has transpired with the magazine-papering Hawthorne? Has he, too, been floated by this great rise of English wit? forsworn whisky, abandoned tobacco, and rejected fishing? No, — by the immortal gods I swear that Hawthorne sticks like coat-plaister to all the old sinful nonsense, the spawn of Satanic ages, the hor-

ror of all readers of the Bible, — to strong drinks and strong meats, and above all to the gentle art of angling, — a true disciple of the pimple-cheeked Walton.

O, never may that day come, of horrors, when the Twice-Told Tales of love and malice shall be fused in the grim Behmenic melting-pot, there to simmer in horrid bathos, unresting ages! Rather let the ingenious Hawthorne, demented, wander over the acetic Styx, tiger or wherryman to superb humbug-Charon; let him "beard the Minos in his den," — do *anything,* before he sells himself, body and soul, for twelve volumes of Greaves manuscripts, or some one volume of metaphysical stuff, fit only to be sold at the shops of second-hand booksellers, or to enjoy their existence as wrapping-literature. I fancy I see him now, throwing his cork, — kinglike ruler of the shades below water, — a vision of my grandfather's fate, — I mean Adam.

This Rabelaisian humor was not unfrequent, where Alcott and Lane were the theme. They did not much enliven this fourth number of the third volume of Emerson's *Dial,* of which the first eighteen pages are filled by Mr. Lane. At the end of the volume appear four pages of a cata-

logue of the Greaves-Lane-Alcott Library, of which Emerson or Thoreau gave this account:

> Mr. Alcott and Mr. Lane have recently brought from England a small but valuable library, amounting to about 1,000 volumes, containing undoubtedly a richer collection of mystical writers than any other library in this country. To the select library of the late J. P. Greaves, "held by Mr. Lane in trust for universal ends," they have added many works of a like character, by purchase, or received as gifts. In their Catalogue, from which the following list is extracted, they say, "The titles of these books are now submitted, in the expectation that this Library is the commencement of an Institution for the nurture of men in universal freedom of action, thought and being." We print this list, not only because our respect is engaged to views so liberal, but because the arrival of this cabinet of mystic and theosophic lore is a remarkable fact in our literary history.

It was this collection which, in the summer of 1843, occupied a hundred feet of shelving in the old red farmhouse at Fruitlands, and from which Mr. Lane in November offered to pledge volumes enough to

secure a wished-for loan of money from Isaac Hecker of New York. One of the volumes, — a *Graeca Minora* of Heidelberg in 1597, containing the extant poems of Pindar, Alcaeus, Alkman, Sappho, Stesichorus, Simonides, Mimnermus, Ibycus and the pseudo-Anacreon, — seems to have been the book which, coming to Thoreau's notice, led to his short article on Anacreon in the same number of the *Dial,* which he afterwards included in his *Week on the Concord and Merrimac.* This library was soon scattered, and volumes from it remained in Alcott's, Emerson's, and my own library. Stanley's *History of Philosophy,* which I think is now in Emerson's library, was bought in London by Alcott for 16 shillings, or $4, and Spinoza in four volumes for 10 shillings. A folio *Diodorus Siculus* was bought for 16 shillings, and the *Divine Emblems* of Quarles for 4 shillings. Dr. Byrom's *Poems* of the 18th century, cost 8 shillings, and Sylvester's *Du Bartas* in folio 18 shillings. Of those in the *Dial* list I have Heinrich Khun-

rath's very curious *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom,* Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence,* and one or two volumes of William Law, all whose books were in the Greaves Library, along with Fenelon, Madame Guyon, Jacob Behmen (as the name was then spelt — now Boehme), Pordage, the English disciple of Behmen, and other Christian mystics. Twelve volumes of Greaves MSS. were there too, and suggested to Channing his irreverent remarks.*

How greatly his opinion of Alcott changed, after the sage returned to Concord in 1844, may be seen by these verses, written,

*A great portion of this choice library was sold by the booksellers, Wiley & Putnam, in New York, for Lane's benefit, between October, 1843, when Thoreau was in New York, and February, 1846, when Lane wrote to Thoreau at Walden thus:

"Dear Friend: The books you were so kind as to deposit about 2 1-2 years ago with Messrs. Wiley & Putnam, have all been sold. But as they were left in your name, it is needful, in strict business, that you should send an order to them to pay to me the amount due. I will therefore thank you to inclose

I suppose, about the time Thoreau was writing his tribute, which first appeared in *Walden* and was suggested by Alcott's visits to the cabin at Walden Pond:

THE HILLSIDE HOUSE.

Here Alcott thought, — respect a wise man's door!
No kinder heart a mortal form e'er held;
Its easy hinges ope forevermore
At touch of all, — or fervid Youth or Eld.

me such an order at your earliest convenience, in a letter addressed to your admiring friend (Post Office, New York City), CHARLES LANE."

Two years later, after Emerson, as Trustee for Lane, had sold the Fruitlands farm to Joseph Palmer, Thoreau wrote to him in London thus (Jan. 12, 1848):

"This stands written in your day-book: 'September 3rd (1847) Received of Boston Savings Bank, on account of Charles Lane, his deposit with interest, $131.03. 16th. Received of Joseph Palmer, on account of Charles Lane, $323.36, being the balance of a note on demand for $400 with interest."

Thus did his Concord friends kindly look after Lane's pecuniary interests, while he was returning from the realm of no money, to the land of Cocaigne and the London Mercantile Price Current, from which he had absented himself a few years.

A mounting sage was he, and could essay
Bold flights of hope, that softly fed his tongue
With honey; then flew swift that happy day,
As tranced in joy on his pure themes we hung.

He knew the Scholar's art; with insight spent
On Plato's sentence, that best poesy,
And calm philosophy, his soul intent
Cleared the grey film of Earth and Air and Sea.

He might have lapsed,—but Heaven him held along,—
Or splendrous faded like some sunset dream;
But long shall live! though this bare, humble song
Gains not his dignity,—nor rounds its theme.

He'll dwell (doubt not) in that fond, wished-for Land,
Where the broad Concave's stars unquailing bloom;
The guest of angels, that consolers stand,—
Sweetly forgot in light Earth's lowly tomb.

Then may I wait, dear Alcott, of thy court,
Or bear a mace in thy Platonic reign!
Though sweet Philosophy be not my forte,
Nor Mincio's reed, nor Learning's weary gain.

Hawthorne had taken up his abode in the Old Manse, nearly two miles away from the

Alcotts, and Ellery Channing, the poet, was soon to occupy a small red cottage near Mr. Emerson's — in fact, just below his garden on the Cambridge Turnpike; while Thoreau was living at Emerson's or with his parents and sisters in the very midst of the village. In May he went away to New York and Staten Island for six or seven months — the longest absence Thoreau ever indulged in after he first went as a boy to live in Concord. The Englishmen were well received in the village, where they took part in debates at the Lyceum, and in set conversations at Emerson's house or elsewhere. One of these was briefly reported by Mrs. Emerson, in a postcript to one of Thoreau's letters to Emerson, who, in early January, 1843, had gone on a lecturing tour in New York, etc., for two months. The date is February 20:

Last evening we had the "Conversation," though, owing to the bad weather, but few attended. The subjects were: What is Prophecy? Who is a Prophet? — and The Love of Nature. Mr. Lane decided, as for

all time and the race, that this same love of nature — of which Henry was the champion, and Elizabeth Hoar and Lidian (though L. disclaimed possessing it herself) his faithful squiresses — that this love was the most subtle and dangerous of sins; a refined idolatry, much more to be dreaded than gross wickednesses. Because the gross sinner would be alarmed by the depth of his degradation, and come up from it in terror; but the unhappy idolaters of nature were deceived by the refined quality of their sin, and would be the last to enter the kingdom. Henry frankly affirmed to both the wise men that they were wholly deficient in the faculty in question, and therefore could not judge of it. And Mr. Alcott as frankly answered that it was because they went beyond the mere material objects, and were filled with spiritual love and perception (as Mr. Thoreau was not) that they seemed to him not to appreciate outward nature. The scene was ineffably comic, though it made no laugh at the time: I scarcely laughed at it myself.

Mr. Lane did not always, perhaps not often, know how amusing he was. He wrote copiously for Garrison's *Liberator*, and in that bold sheet made much of Alcott's arrest by the deputy sheriff, because he would not pay his town tax, but would go to jail in-



CHARLES LANE



stead. Thoreau, who afterward had a like prison experience in the old stone jail of Concord, was disposed rather to make light of this imprisonment of Alcott, (which occurred in January of that eventful winter), and wrote thus of it to Emerson at New York:

Mr. Alcott has not altered much since you left. I think you will find him much the same sort of person. With Mr. Lane I have had one regular chat; and as two or three as regular conversations have taken place since, I fear there may have been a precession of the equinoxes. I suppose they have told you how near Mr. Alcott went to jail; but I can add a good anecdote to the rest. When Staples came to collect Mrs. Ward's taxes, my sister Helen asked him what he thought Mr. Alcott meant — what his idea was — and Sam answered, "I vum, I believe it was nothing but principle, for I never heerd a man talk honester." There was a lecture on Peace by a Mr. Spear the same evening; and as the gentlemen, Lane and Alcott, dined at our house while the matter was in suspense — that is, while the constable was waiting for his receipt from the jailer — we there settled it that we, that is, Lane and myself, perhaps, should agitate the State while

Winkelried lay in durance. But when over the audience, I saw our hero's head moving in the free air of the Universalist church, my fire all went out, and the State was safe as far as I was concerned. But Lane, it seems, had cogitated and even written on the matter, in the afternoon; and so, out of courtesy, taking his point of departure from the Spear-man's lecture, he drove gracefully *in medias res*, and gave the affair a good setting out.

What Lane wrote, in his cool chamber at the Hosmer cottage, has been preserved to us by the *Liberator*, and gives clearly enough Alcott's theory of his act, which most of his friends lamented:

A Bronson Alcott, being convinced that his payment of the Concord town tax involved principles and practice most degrading and injurious to man, had long determined not to be a party to its continuance. Last year, by the leniency of the tax-collector in prepaying the $1.50, the question was not brought to an issue. This year a collector was appointed who could execute the law; and although, no doubt, it went hard with him to snatch a man away from his home, from his wife, from the provision and education of his little children — in which he found Mr. Alcott serene-

ly engaged, he nevertheless did it. To the county jail, therefore, Mr. A. went, or rather was forced by the benignant State and its delicate instrument. The constable-collector, having brought his victim to the jail, the next step was to find the jailer, who appeared to be not at home. The prisoner, of course, waited patiently; and after nearly two hours had been thus passed, the constable announced that he no longer had the right to detain his captive; he said that both the tax and costs had been paid. To the question, by whom the payment had been made, he replied by naming a gentleman who may be regarded, and who would willingly be regarded, as the very personification of the State. This act of non-resistance does not rest on the plea of poverty; for Mr. A. has always supplied some poor neighbor with food and clothing to a much higher amount than the tax. But it is founded on the moral instinct which forbids us to be a party to the destructive principles of power and might over peace and love.

The tax is traditionally said to have been paid by Squire Samuel Hoar, the first citizen of the town, and the father of the late Senator, Frisbie Hoar, and of Miss Elizabeth Hoar, who was engaged to marry Charles Emerson, the youngest brother of Waldo

Emerson. It was not paid by Alcott's friend, Emerson, nor did the latter pay Thoreau's tax a few years later. Indeed, he dissented from his friend's radicalism in the matter of the taxes; and in his Journal for 1843 Emerson said:

> Alcott thought he could find as good grounds for quarrel in the State tax as Socrates did in the edicts of the judges. Then I said, "Be consistent, and never more put an apple or a kernel of corn into your mouth. Would you feed the Devil? Say boldly, 'I will not any longer belong to this double-faced, equivocating, mixed, jesuitical Universe.' "

The date of Alcott's arrest appears to have been January 14. Soon after that date, and in less than three months after landing in Boston (Oct. 20, 1842) Henry Wright had become in some way discontented with the Alcott household, and had gone off to Lynn, where Mrs. Mary Sargent Gove, a New Hampshire sanitary reformer, (afterwards known as Mrs. Gove-Nichols), was editing a health Journal, published in Boston. In

the letter to Junius Alcott, above quoted, Lane said, "I suppose you do not see the *Dial*, or Mrs. Gove's new periodical, called the *Independent Magazine*. I have merged *The Healthian* into the latter, and I have some articles in the former." Mr. Wright also contributed, I think, to Mrs. Gove's *Magazine*, which did not long flourish. He did not join the Fruitlands monastery, but returned to England before Lane did, and died there in March, 1846; his wife also dying in October of the same year. In Concord he had early begun to complain to Alcott of Lane, and to Lane of Alcott; the last named, being a methodical person, with schoolmasterly habits, found Wright irregular, nice in his food, etc.; while Wright declared that Alcott was "despotic." Mr. Lane, who had much good sense mixed up with his vagaries, gave his friend Oldham the true cause of dissension when he wrote:

> I can see no other reason but the simplicity and order to which affairs were coming [in the Cottage],

No butter nor milk, nor cocoa, nor tea, nor coffee — nothing but fruit, grains, and water, was hard for the inside; then regular hours and places, clearing up scraps, etc., was desperate hard for the outside.

Still, all through the spring of 1843 Lane stood firmly by Alcott, and resolutely put his English money into Massachusetts land, to free it from the curse of ownership. Writing to Junius Alcott, March 7, he said:

I hope that the little cash I have collected from my London toils will suffice to redeem a small spot on the planet, that we may rightly use for the right owner. I would very much prefer a small example of true life to a large society in false and selfish harmony. Please put your best worldly thoughts to the subject, and favor me with your view as to how and where we could best lay out $1,800 or $2,000 in land, with orchard, wood and house. Some of the land must be now fit for the spade, as we desire to give all animals their freedom. We feel it desirable to keep within the range of Mind and Letters; or rather, to keep refinement within our range; that we may be the means of improving or of reproving it, without being injured by it.

This last flight of rhetoric signified that the new Eden must not be too far from Boston, and that oxen and cows were not to be much employed on the redeemed land. The conditions thus laid down represented Lane rather more than Alcott; but the Connecticut farmer and mechanic, pedlar and schoolmaster, yielded gracefully to English dogmatism, and wrote thus to persuade his brother Junius to join them in Massachusetts, and bring their widowed mother with him:

Our mutual friend, Mr. Lane, has detailed so minutely and fully our present vocations and intents, that nothing remains for me to add, but my pleasure in all he has written, and to repeat my earnest hope that Providence may include yourself, with all your fine gifts and graces, in the circle of our family. Your own sense of rectitude must plant or transplant you, according to its interior and superior dictates; and to it I submit the decision. . . Our Mother must not be deserted; if she feels you needful, and prefers to remain in Oriskany with you — then so let it be. We shall dwell together some day. I would that she might join us also — on a visit at least, if she declines making her home with us.

We are all waiting to see the earth (under the snow), and select our spot — a convenient house, orchards and fields — and begin to plant for our own sustenance. Great improvements have blessed my labors for the companion and children, during the winter. Mr. Lane is a most potent and friendly coadjutor, and will meet your idea of a man.

THE NEW EDEN

After looking at several farms in Concord and elsewhere, Lane decided to buy the Wyman farm in Harvard, two miles from the village of that name, but less than a mile from Still River, another village in the same township. Alcott would have chosen the Cliffs, in Concord, a favorite resort of Thoreau and the Emerson family, and Emerson would have preferred to retain his friend in his own town; but Lane had rather avoided Emerson, as not ascetic enough for his abstemious habits, and seems to have been not unwilling to withdraw Alcott from what he regarded as an unfavorable influence. Isaac Hecker, later known as Father Hecker, of a Roman Catholic order, who spent a few

weeks at the Wyman farm, which Alcott christened "Fruitlands," thus described it, soon after the ascetic community there had abandoned it, and Lane had gone with his son to the neighboring community of Shakers:

Fruitlands, so-called because fruit was to be the principal staple of daily food, and to be cultivated on the farm, was a spot well chosen; it was retired, breathing quiet and tranquillity. No neighboring dwelling obstructed the view of nature, and it lay some distance even from a bypath road, in a delightful solitude. The house, somewhat dilapidated, was on the slope of a slowly ascending hill; stretched before it was a small valley under cultivation, with fields of corn, potatoes and meadow. In the distance loomed up on high, "Cheshire's haughty hill," Monadnoc. Such was the spot chosen by men inspired to live a holier life, to bring Eden once more upon earth. These men were impressed with the religiousness of their enterprise. When the first load of hay was driven into the barn, one of the family, as the first fork was about to be plunged into it, took off his hat and said, "I take off my hat, not that I reverence the barn more than other places, but because this is the first fruit of our labor." Then a few moments were given to si-

lence, that holy thought might be awakened. But winter, stern, cold, inhospitable winter approached; and Fruitlands, with its knot of spiritually-minded enthusiasts, disappeared; and Eden once more re-entered the domain of the Past.

Such was the brief chronicle of Charles Lane's purchase of 90 acres of land, to redeem it from human ownership. It was good land, the price ($1800) was not excessive; the house was not bought with the land, but given rent-free for a year; Lane expecting, apparently, that a better house would be built, at the expense of others than himself. There were 14 acres of woodland in the purchase, and much pasture; but Lane was all for spade-labor, without oxen, and also insisted on plowing in his green crops of grass to enrich the land for next year. By June 16, after a fortnight's residence and labor, the farm had four acres planted with maize, three acres in rye and oats, two in potatoes, one in barley, and one in vegetables and melons. At the outset, ten persons made the family — the six Alcotts, two Lanes, Abra-

ham Everett and Christopher (or Samuel) Larned, the latter a merchant's son, and Everett, a cooper. To these were fitfully added, but not as steady residents, Samuel Bower, an Englishman, Isaac Hecker, a baker's son of New York, and Miss Anne Page; also Joseph Palmer, who afterwards bought the farm. But at no time were the constant residents more than twelve, of whom five were children, and one an infant of three years. There were occasional visitors, Emerson and Ellery Channing, Mrs. Alcott's brother, Rev. S. J. May, etc., and of course the neighboring farmers looked in occasionally, out of curiosity, or to lend advice, and laugh about these tender-fingered husbandmen with one another. At first, all was roseate to the two heads of the plantation, Lane and Alcott; and Lane (June 9) wrote thus to Thoreau at Staten Island:

> After all our efforts during the spring had failed to place us in connection with the earth; and Mr. Alcott's journeys to Oriskany and Vermont had turned out a blank; one afternoon in the latter part of May

Providence sent to us the legal owner of a slice of the planet in Harvard, with whom we have been enabled to conclude for the concession of his rights. It is very romotely placed, without a road, surrounded by a beautiful green landscape of fields and woods, with the distance filled up with some of the loftiest mountains in the State. At present there is much hard manual labor — so much that, as you see, my usual handwriting is very greatly suspended. Our house accommodations are poor and scanty; but the greatest want is of good female society. Far too much labor devolves on Mrs. Alcott. . . Besides the busy occupations of each succeeding day, we form in this ample theatre of hope, many forthcoming scenes. The nearer little copse is designed as the site of the cottages. Fountains can be made to descend from their granite sources on the hill-slope to every apartment, if desired. Gardens are to displace the warm grazing glades on the south, and numerous human beings, instead of cattle, shall here enjoy existence.

Even in July, when the birthday of little May Alcott was celebrated with rural rites in the wood by the brook, the glamor of hope still hung round the groves and the scanty orchard; and the library of rare books from

London stood proudly on its hundred feet of new shelves in the small front entry of the old house, proclaiming the atmosphere of "Mind and Letters." In August and September the patriarchs went rambling away to Providence and New York, and returned by way of New Haven and Wolcott, Alcott's ancestral region, of which Mr. Lane formed a very poor opinion, as a farming district. They were entertained by Isaac Hecker in New York, and by Charles Newcomb and his friends in Providence.

Emerson, visiting Fruitlands July 8, when the experiment was six weeks old, was doubtful about speedy success, and wrote in his journal:

> I will not prejudge them successful. They look well in July — we will see them in December. I know they are better for themselves than as partners. One can easily see that they have yet to settle several things. Their saying that things are clear, and they sane, does not make them so. . . Their manners and behavior in the house and in the field were those of superior men — of men at rest.

This passage indicates that Emerson, with his "fatal gift of perception," had long since seen the incongruity between Alcott and Lane. He had been aware, of course, of the estrangement and separation of Wright, both from Lane and Alcott; and the final collapse in December of the whole Fruitlands experiment was no surprise to him. He then became a trustee for Lane and his creditors in America, as will appear later.

At this time all was still fair weather at the Fruitlands Eden, although the burden of too much labor, of which Lane had written to Thoreau in June, had been falling more and more heavily on Mrs. Alcott and her daughters, Anna, then twelve, and Louisa, not quite eleven. As they did so much of the domestic drudgery, Mrs. Alcott doubtless thought it no more than right that her English guest, both there and at Concord, during the seven months that Lane and his son were in her household, should pay their share of the family expenses. This opinion had led, apparently, to the payment by Lane of some

$300 for Concord debts of the Alcott cottage, before the household migrated to Fruitlands in June. Considered merely as the board bill of the two Lanes, this was not excessive; since $300 for 30 weeks was but $10 a week for both. Whether this was the basis upon which the May payment was made by Lane, there is no evidence to show; but it is a natural inference. Probably Lane, who had selected the Fruitlands farm, rather against the wish of the Alcotts, who preferred Concord, was also willing to pay what was needed in the five months from June to November, at the newly plowed and planted Wyman Farm Paradise. But, since "short reckonings make long friends," a delay in coming to a clear understanding on these points had, by November 11, 1843, led to a state of things which Lane thus explained, (with many apologies for "obtruding my pecuniary concerns into our hitherto loftier communings") to Isaac Hecker, then living with his prosperous family in the baking business at New York:

[Harvard, Mass., November 11]. . . When I bought this place, instead of paying the whole $1,800 as I wished, $300 of my money went to pay old debts, with which I ought to have had nothing to do: and Mrs. Alcott's brother, Samuel J. May, joined his name to mine in a note for $300, to be paid by installments in two years. And now that the first installment is due, he sends me word that he declines paying it. As all my cash has been expended in buying and keeping up the affair, I am left in a precarious position, out of which I do not see the way without some loveful aid; and to you I venture freely to submit my feelings. Above all things I should like to discharge at once this $300 note; as, unless that is done, the place must, I fear, fall back into individuality, and the idea be suspended. Now, if as much cash is loose in your pocket, or that of some wealthy friend, there shall be parted off as much of the land as will secure its return, from the crops alone, in a few years; or I would sell a piece until I can redeem it; or I would meet the loan in any other secure way, if I can but secure the land from the demon, Usury. This mode seems to me the most desirable. But I could get along with the installment of $75, and would offer like security in proportion. Or, if you can do it yourself, and would prefer the library as a pledge, you shall select such books as will suit your own reading, and would cover your advance

in cash, any day you choose to put them up at auction, if I should fail to redeem them. Or I would give my notes of hand, that I could meet by sales of produce or of land. If I had the benefit of your personal counsel, we could contrive something between us, I am sure; but I have no such aid about me. The difficulty in itself is really light; but to me, under present circumstances, is quite formidable. If at your earliest convenience you acquaint me with your mind, you will much oblige.

That Lane had somehow miscalculated is evident. Late in June he had assured his friend Oldham in England, that he should not return thither. "No, I think I am now out of the money world. Let my privation be ever so great, I will never make any property claim on this [Fruitlands] effort. It is an offering to the Eternal Spirit; and I consider that I have no more right than any other person; I have arranged the title deeds as well as I could to meet that end. I could only consent to return to England on condition of being held free, like a child, from all money entanglements." [But by Octo-

ber 30 such entanglements had come at Fruitlands]. "I believe the crops will not liquidate all the obligations they were expected to discharge; and against going farther into debt I am most determinately settled."

PARADISE LOST

Writing to Oldham at the end of this anxious November, Lane tells how his son William had been ill a month, and his father had nursed him "plagued with hands so chapped and sore that I was little more capable than the patient." Then Mr. May (for some good reason, no doubt) had signified he should not pay the first installment of the note, $75 for six months; "so that money affairs and individual property came back again upon me." Then came endless discussions, and, as Wordsworth says in *Dion*:

Doubts that came too late, and wishes vain,
Hollow excuses and triumphant pain;
And oft their cogitations sink as low
As to the abysses of a joyless heart

The heavy plummet of despair can go:
But whence that sudden check? that fearful start?

The entries in Louisa's childish diary of this autumn are brief, but illuminating. She did not like Mr. Lane, but the work done by her and Anna did not make so dismal an impression on her at the time, as it did in memory, thirty years later. Here is the record given in Mrs. Cheney's Life — omitting unessential details:

Fruitlands, September 1, 1843. I rose at 5 and had my bath. I love cold water! Then we had our singing-lesson with Mr. Lane. After breakfast I washed dishes, and ran on the hill till 9, and had some thoughts — it was so beautiful up there. Did my lessons, wrote and spelt and did sums; and Mr. Lane read a story about a rich girl and a poor girl. . . I liked it very much, and shall be kind to poor people. . . We had bread and fruit for dinner. I read and walked and played till supper-time. We sung in the evening. As I went to bed the moon came up very brightly and looked at me. I felt sad because I have been cross today, and did not mind Mother. I cried, and then I felt better, and said that piece from Mrs. Sigourney —

I must not tease my mother.

I get to sleep saying poetry; I know a great deal.

Thursday, Sept. 11th. Mr. Parker Pillsbury came, and we talked about the poor slaves. I had a music lesson with Miss Page. I hate her, she is so fussy. I ran in the wind, and played be a horse, and had a lovely time in the woods with Anna and Lizzie. We were fairies, and made gowns and paper wings. I "flied" the highest of all. It rained when I went to bed, and made a pretty noise on the roof.

[This shows that her bed was in the garret.]

Sunday, Sept. 21. Father and Mr. Lane have gone to New Haven to preach. Anna and I got supper. In the eve. I read *Vicar of Wakefield.*

October 8. When I woke up the first thought I got was, "It's Mother's birthday; I must be very good." I ran and wished her a happy birthday, and gave her my kiss. After breakfast we gave her our presents. I had a moss cross and a piece of poetry for her. We did not have any school, and played in the woods and got red leaves. In the evening we danced and sung, and I read a story about "Contentment." I wish I was rich! I was good, and we were all a happy family this day.

Tuesday, 12th. After lessons I ironed. We all went to the barn and husked corn. It was good fun. We worked till 8 o'clock, and had lamps. . . I read in Plutarch. I made a verse about sunset:

Softly doth the sun descend
To his couch behind the hill;
Then, O then I love to sit
On mossy banks beside the rill.

Anna thought it was very fine; but I didn't like it very well.

Friday, Nov. 2. Anna and I did the work. In the evening Mr. Lane asked us "What is man?" . . . After a long walk we went to bed very tired.

Tuesday, Nov. 20. I rose at 5, and after breakfast washed the dishes, and then helped Mother work. Miss Page is gone, and Anna in Boston. In the evening I made some pretty things for my dolly. Father and Mr. Lane had a talk, and Father asked us if *we* saw any reason for us to separate. Mother wanted to, she is so tired. I like it, but not the school part, nor Mr. Lane.

Thursday, Nov. 29. It was Father's and my birthday — eleven years old. We had some nice presents. We played in the snow before school. Mother read *Rosamond.* Father asked us what troubled us most. I said, "My bad temper!"

December 10, (1843). I did my lessons and walked in the afternoon. Father read to us in dear *Pilgrim's Progress.* . . . Mr. Lane was in Boston, and we were glad. In the eve Father and Mother and Annie and I had a long talk. I was very unhappy, and we

all cried. Anna and I cried in bed, and I prayed God to keep us all together.

In the midst of debates Mrs. Alcott gave notice that she should soon withdraw to a house in the near village of Still River, which her brother and other friends had offered for herself and children. "As she will take all the furniture with her," said Lane, "this leaves me alone and naked in the world; Mr. Alcott and I could not remain together without her. To be 'that devil come from old England to separate husband and wife' I will not; though it might gratify New England to be able to *say* it." He ascribes the failure of other persons to join the experiment largely to Mrs. Alcott, "who vows that her own family are all that she lives for, or wishes to live for." No such narrow purpose, Lane adds, has inspired him; and he blames Mr. Alcott for listening too much to his family affections, and regarding too much what that guardian angel of middle-class England, Mrs. Grundy, will

say. "Constancy to his wife, and inconstancy to the Spirit have blurred over his life forever." In the spring of 1844, Lane laments to Oldham that Alcott cultivates his Still River garden, permits his girls to go to the common school, and allows his wife to obtain the needful supplies from her friends and relatives. About this time some money came to her from the estate of her father, Col. Joseph May, of Boston, and this, in due time, was put into the Hillside estate in Concord, which Hawthorne bought of her in 1852 for $1,500. In 1844 the Alcotts returned to Concord, and in 1845 settled upon this estate, of thirty acres, which Hawthorne afterward called "The Wayside." Lane with his son retired to live for a time with the Shakers of Harvard, then withdrew to New Jersey, and in September, 1846, he went back to England, leaving William with the Shakers until 1848.

By invitation of Mrs. Alcott, Mr. Lane resided with the Alcotts a few weeks in the summer and autumn of 1845, and there

formed a better opinion of husband and wife; said that his garden across what is now Massachusetts Avenue from the Wayside House was "the best piece of preaching he has for a long time preached," and predicted it would be better in 1846, as it was. This position of gardener and educator of his four children Lane pronounced "as happy for him as could be found, in his mixed and inevitable relations." In the middle of September, 1845, Alcott heard from his brother Ambrose that his brother Junius was "deranged" and went at once to Wolcott to attend to his own family there. Lane charitably adds that perhaps Alcott's own troubles were due to insanity. In after years Alcott was inclined to the same view. When I was editing the *Boston Commonwealth* in 1863, (in which Louisa's *Hospital Sketches* first appeared) he brought me a revised copy of his account of his despair at the failure of the Fruitlands venture, which I published in this form:

THE RETURN

Patriae quis exul
Se quoque fugit?

As from himself he fled,
Outcast, insane,
Tormenting demons drove him from the gate:
Away he sped,
Casting his joys behind,—
His better mind:
Recovered,
Himself again,
Over his threshold led,
Peace fills his breast,—
He finds his rest,—
Expecting angels his arrival wait.

This verse describes the period of despair, following the departure of Lane and his son to the Shakers, and the manifest failure of this dream of an earthly Eden in a New England winter. In her *Transcendental Wild Oats,* published by Miss Alcott thirty years later (1873),—a sketch in which fiction and truth mingle oddly,—she

thus pictured the same despair, late in November, 1843:

Then this dreamer, whose dream was the life of his life, resolved to carry out his idea to the bitter end. There seemed no place for him here, — no work, no friend. Better perish of want than sell his soul for the sustenance of the body. Silently he lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and waited for Death to cut the knot which he could not untie. Days and nights went by, and neither food nor water passed his lips. Soul and body were dumbly struggling together, and no word of complaint betrayed what either suffered. His wife, when tears and prayers were unavailing, sat down to wait the end with a mysterious awe and submission; for in this entire resignation of all things there was an eloquent significance to her. Gathering her children about her, she waited the issue in that solitary room, while the first snow fell outside, untrodden by the footprints of a single friend. . . . But when the bitterness of death was nearly over, when the body was past any pang of hunger or thirst, and the soul stood ready to depart, — the love that outlives all else refused to die. "My faithful wife, my little girls, — they have not forsaken me; they are mine by ties that none can break. What right have I to leave them alone? what

right to escape from the burden and sorrow I have helped to bring? This duty remains to me, and I must do it manfully. For their sakes the world will forgive me in time; for their sakes God will sustain me now." Too feeble to rise, he groped for the food that always lay within his reach; and in the darkness and solitude of that memorable night ate and drank what was to him the bread and wine of a new communion. In the early dawn, when that sad wife crept fearfully to see what change had come to that patient face on the pillow, she found it smiling at her, — saw a wasted hand outstretched to her, and heard a feeble voice cry bravely, — "Hope!". Soon after, the wan shadow of a man came forth, leaning on the arm that never failed him, — to be welcomed and cherished by the children, who never forgot the experiences of that time. . . . So one bleak December day, with their few possessions piled on an ox-sled, the rosy children perched atop, and the parents trudging arm in arm behind, — the exiles left their Eden and faced the world again.

PARADISE REGAINED

In the fifth volume of his *Autobographical Collections,* covering the years 1840-44, Alcott inserted, near the end, a rude woodcut, of a yoke of oxen drawing through light

snow a sled-load of the family, which he labeled, "Removing from Fruitlands, January, 1844." It was January, doubtless, before they got fairly settled in a "Brick-Ends" house of the Lovejoys at Still River; where they were neighbors of the Gardners, whose children became the playmates and correspondents of the Alcott girls, and pupils with them of Miss Chase, the school-teacher. But Louisa is probably right in fixing the date late in December, 1843. The Eden-episode had lasted just seven months, and the whole fellowship of Fruitlands was dissolved. The farm, which had been held in trust by Rev. S. J. May, Mrs. Alcott's brother, was in March, 1845, transferred to Mr. Emerson as trustee, and eventually bought by Joseph Palmer, the bearded brother, known in Harvard as the "Old Jew," while beards were unfashionable, and called by Miss Alcott "Moses White." He was no Jew, but a descendant of Captain Wiswall, an Old Colony Indian fighter, who had received a grant of land from the Pro-

vince for his Indian campaign, and located in Leominster, near Harvard. It had come down to Palmer, and he had offered it for the use of Lane, after the hasty purchase of the Wyman Farm; too late to be accepted. Palmer bought the Wyman house, which, with the Fruitlands Farm, remained long in his possession and that of his daughter, Mrs. Holman. About 1848 the Worcester and Nashua railroad was laid out through the farm, and near the house, cutting off the orchard and hillside from the meadow and woodland. Whoever travels by that line now (a branch of the Boston & Maine road) may see the house, with old mulberry trees in front of it, on the east side of the track, a short mile north of the Still River station. It was sold in 1847 for Mr. Lane's benefit by Emerson, and the price was $1,700. By that time Lane was back at his old home in Alcott House, where Emerson called on him early in 1848. Writing to Thoreau from London, February, 1848, Emerson said:

> I went last Sunday for the first time to see Lane

at Ham, and dined with him. He was full of friendliness and hospitality; has a school of sixteen children, one lady as matron, then Oldham. This is all the household. They looked just comfortable.

This matron was no doubt Miss Hannah Bond, who was about the age of Thoreau, had lived in Robert Owen's community at Harmony Hall, and soon after married Charles Lane, in spite of his aversion to family ties, and his faith, in 1843, that "individual family life" would soon be given up. They had four sons and one daughter, and two of the sons still survive. Their mother died in 1893, and Lane himself in 1870. He was a year younger than Alcott, who survived until 1888, — dying but a few days before Louisa.

Those who read Louisa's *Transcendental Wild Oats* will see by her names, — "Timon Lion" for Lane, and "Abel Lamb" for Alcott, —that she looked on her father as rather the victim of Lane in the Fruitlands failure. Without conceding this, the impartial

observer will say that Lane had the stronger will, and the far more prosaic nature; that he decided most of the questions for his associates in both countries, and that he was rather a hard person to get on with. Neither his first wife, nor Wright, nor Mrs. Alcott, nor Alcott himself, nor the Harvard Shakers, nor finally Oldham, could quite suit him. He over-persuaded Alcott, who was a good farmer and mechanic, to adopt impossible modes of working the Fruitlands Farm; and much of their whimsies in dress and food seem to have come from Lane and his English friends. Mrs. Alcott, when re-established in a home of her own at Concord, early in 1845, offered Lane a home there, and he tried it for a time in the next summer, but still complained, as he had at Fruitlands, that she wished to keep her family small, and made it uncomfortable for guests. Knowing Mrs. Alcott's character well, in the last twenty years of her life, I cannot believe this was ever true of her. She was hospitality itself, whether poor or rich; and it must

have been Lane's own individualism that made him dissatisfied.

There was some foundation for Alcott's despair at Fruitlands, and with the ill success that had followed him after the flourishing Temple School in Boston. Emerson, the gentlest and least exacting of men, looking at his friend's situation a few years after the Fruitlands episode, wrote in his private journal:

> The plight of Mr. Alcott! The most refined and the most advanced soul we have had in New England; who makes all other souls appear slow and cheap and mechanical; a man of such courtesy and greatness that in conversation all others, even the intellectual, seem sharp, and fighting for victory and angry, — while he has the unalterable sweetness of a Muse! Yet because he cannot earn money by his talk or his pen, or by schoolkeeping, or bookkeeping, or editing, — or any kind of meanness, — nay, for this very cause, that he is ahead of his contemporaries, is higher than they, and keeps himself out of the shop condescensions and smug arts which they stoop to, — or, unhappily, need not stoop to, but find themselves, as it were, born to; therefore it is the unanimous opinion

of New England judges that this man must die! We do not adjudge him to hemlock or garroting, — we are much too hypocritical and cowardly for that. But we not less surely doom him by refusing to protest against this doom, or combine to save him, and to set him in employments fit for him and salutary for the State.

In one of his many conversations with me, after he came to live and die with me, in September, 1891, Channing spoke (in 1899) of Mrs. Alcott and her brother, S. J. May, who, he said, "was less thoughtful than Mr. Alcott, and less refined than Mrs. Alcott, who was one of the most refined persons of my acquaintance. She told me years afterward that in 1843-44 she feared for her husband's sanity; he did such strange things, without seeming to know how odd they were; wearing only linen clothes and canvas shoes, and eating only vegetables and milk. Her family, the Mays of Boston, had much contempt for Mr. Alcott, and looked on him as unworthy to marry Miss May in 1829; but some of them changed their opinion as he came to be better known." Writing to Emerson at

London in the winter of 1847-48, Channing thus spoke of the Hillside House, of which he was writing the verses already quoted:

> The elephantine Alcott is patching up that old Cogswell shell in which he lives, by clapping a dormer-window into the roof, — like Miss Potter's false curls. How would a decaying turtle look with a new comb glued to his scales?

It had been a poor fabric until Alcott took it in hand, hardly better than the Fruitlands House; describing it after it came into Hawthorne's possession in 1852, George William Curtis, who had spent a season in that part of Concord (the East Quarter), wrote thus:

> When Alcott came into possession in 1845 it was a miserable little house of two peaked gables; but his tasteful fingers touched it with picturesque grace. It lies at the foot of a wooded hill, a neat house of a rusty olive hue, with a porch in front, and a central peak; a piazza at each end. Upon the hill behind he built terraces and arbors, and pavilions, of boughs and rough stems of trees. Fine locust trees shade them, and ornament the hill with perennial beauty. Wal-

den Pond is just behind the wood in front, across the meadow; and not far away over the meadows behind the hill, sluggishly steals Concord River. Eight acres of good land lie in front of the house, across the Lexington Road, and in the rear the estate extends for 25 acres over the brow of the hill.

What Alcott did to beautify and cultivate this small estate, shows what he might have done at Fruitlands, if he could have had his own modest way; or still better in some convenient Concord valley, not too far from Boston.

THE PRESENT FRUITLANDS

Channing himself told me in after years that he had twice visited the Fruitlands House, — once with Henry G. Wright, — which must have been in early spring, if at all, — and once with Emerson in the summer of 1843. This may have been Emerson's July visit. They drove up through West Acton and Boxboro, near the great oak-wood of the Inches family of Boston, which was afterwards visited and described by Thoreau, in company with Channing.

My own first visit to Fruitlands was not till after the death of the Alcotts, and was in a company made up of persons from several parts of the United States, all interested to see where the Alcotts had sowed their "Transcendental wild-oats," as Louisa used to say. The date was August 21, 1895; the party consisted of George Bartlett, a Concord poet and comedian, Miss Gourgas, of Concord, a descendant of an old French Calvinist family, exiled to Switzerland by the edict of Louis XIV. revoking his grandfather's Edict of Nantes, and for 100 years resident in New England; her neighbor, Miss Eaton, Mr. and Mrs. Waite of New Jersey, — the latter a Miss Stow of New Haven, who had studied painting in Holland, and carried a kodak, with which she took views of the farmhouse, exterior and interior, the children, the farmer, etc. To these five were added Mrs. Parker, of Galveston, Texas, her sister, Miss Bryan, and her niece, another Miss Bryan; making nine besides myself. We went by train to the

Still River station, and then walked back on the track and through the pastures to the farm, which was then (1895) the property of Mr. Holman, a son-in-law of Joseph Palmer, who had bought it of Mr. Lane. Channing had assured me it was not on a hillside, as I had thought, but at the level of the intervale land on the west end of the farm, in a bend of the Nashua river. I found we were both mistaken; there is a hill, and the farmhouse stands on the lower slope of it, considerably above the intervale; while the main hill rises back of the house, to the eastward, from 50 to 100 feet; and from its summit commands a wide view of Wachusett, 2,300 feet high, and the nearest New Hampshire mountains, (Uncanoonucs, Peterboro Hills, etc.) terminating in the peak of Monadnoc, 50 miles away and 3,200 feet high. The Bryans, originally from Virginia, said the view reminded them of the Blue Ridge and the Shenandoah Valley. The Nashua, a third of a mile westward, is there a stream as large as the Concord, and winding like that, but not so

meadowy nor so muddy, always having an upland meadow or intervale on one bank. It makes the boundary here between the townships of Harvard and Lancaster.

The farm was rented then to a Vermont husbandman from the little town of Somerset, near Gen. Stark's battlefield of Bennington. He was paying a rent of $96 a year for the old house and the hundred acres of fair farming land, and supporting from its product his wife and three children. They were, as the French say, "pretty as angels," with fair hair and blue eyes; the eldest, aged four, Maribelle Roberts, was turning the grindstone at the end of the shed, east of the main house, to grind the scythe of her father, Marsena Roberts. In the house was Mrs. Roberts, tending a baby four months old, and a boy of three years, named, she said, "Marseny," for his father. I did not recognize the name, and said to the boy, "Your father must have named you for Massena, a general of the French." "No," said the mother, "it is a good Bible name, in the first chapter

of the Book of Esther." Sure enough, there it was, one of the seven princes of Persia, — Carshena, Shether, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. Mrs. Roberts kindly showed us over the house; it is very old and out of repair, although perhaps as good as when the Alcotts lived there, 52 years before. Instead of the faded ochre-red of that period, it has long been white; and the big old chimney, which used to block up the front entry, and had the great kitchen fireplace in it, had been taken out at the bottom, and the front entry ran through it, as in the Alcotts' Orchard House at Concord, which is a hundred years older. At the right of this entry was a large room used for dining, and where Channing dined with the family in 1843; behind that the long kitchen, with a small bedroom at its west end, and the woodshed opening out of the kitchen at the east end. In front of the house are now three mulberry trees, planted by the Alcotts (possibly for silk-worm feeding); and back of the house, at some distance, the remains

of the old orchard of appletrees, which Miss Alcott mentions as giving the name to the place. I rather imagine the Fruitlands name was given from future expectations; for the philosophers expected to cultivate the small fruits, on the ascending slope, looking to the southwest. On the intervale, sandy and easy of culture, they raised barley, rye, oats, and Indian corn, and there was a good crop of hay. The Alcott barn, which stood directly in front of the house, had been taken away, and the new one stands a little farther off, and near the railroad, which now runs within 150 feet of the house. Roberts was carrying on the farm with no help but his wife and children, and an occasional hired man. When I was there a few years after, he had gone, but there was another tenant. The place is now valued for taxation at $1,500.

ALCOTT'S CHARACTER

As to the insanity which Lane's charity suggested, and which Alcott's humility ac-

cepted as an occasion of his despair, — it was less Alcott's condition than that of the community which did not see his value. I was for nearly a quarter-century officially inspecting the insane of Massachusetts, and in that period saw every variety of that malady among the 20,000 of that class who passed under my consideration. Insanity, so little understood by most of us, has certain features by which it is differentiated from those passing moods of enthusiasm, grief, ambition, or desire, with which the shallow confound it. Alcott and John Brown were enthusiasts; they were never insane, but at the farthest remove from it. The Southern disunionists and champions of slavery who inspired our great rebellion and brought on the Civil War, were ambitious enthusiasts, who miscalculated the future and their own possibilities as wildly, and far more calamitously to themselves and others, than did Alcott and Lane at Fruitlands; but they were never insane, even in their most cherished delusions. Such comparisons

might be indefinitely extended; but these are sufficient. Insanity could never be predicated of Bronson Alcott.

How then about his unpracticality, which was so often charged against him, and which made him the target for much cheap wit? He was born into a world of material comfort and prosaic achievement, but completely outside of his proper place and time, of which he was ever in advance, both in sentiment and idea. As I had occasion to say near the close of my *Memoir* of him, published in 1893, and too little read, I fear:

> He should have inherited ample estates in a society friendly to culture and not inhospitable to thought; such a position as many English gentlemen have held, and from which they have stept forth upon occasion, to render great service to their country and the world. Clarendon said of the poet Waller that he was "a very pleasant discourser, and therefore grateful to all kind of company, where he was not the less esteemed for being very rich." So it would have been a temporary advantage to Alcott, had he possessed an assured income, such as exalts,

in every Anglo-Saxon mind, the worth of opinions that come from men of property. Lord Chatham, dwelling on the merits of the American army under Washington, assured the House of Lords in the most serious manner, as a high compliment, "that the Virginia gentleman who commands that army has an assured income of not less than four thousand pounds sterling." A quarter part of that income would have freed this Connecticut gentleman from three-quarters of the ridicule which vulgar persons in fine linen bestowed upon him.

Such advantage was denied him, and his Fruitlands scheme, though it would have failed in any case, seemed more hopelessly to fail because he had not, like Robert Owen, much property to spend in such fruitless philanthropy. But it brought its own compensations, and left the whole Alcott family richer and not poorer for this romantic experience, with its sad termination. It prepared Alcott to face more patiently the storms of later life, and to train his daughter, who was his best single gift to the world, better for her conspicuous service. And Fruitlands will be remembered, perhaps,

longer than most of the adventures that awaited this romantic household in its voyage of life.

THE ALCOTT FAMILY

Seven years after my first visit to Fruitlands and Still River, Mrs. Anne Lovejoy Clark, daughter of the Lovejoys who owned the "Brick Ends" in which the Alcotts took refuge in 1844, published a pleasing little book, *The Alcotts in Harvard*, in which some kindly reparation is made for the insults heaped on the Fruitlands ascetics in the town history of Harvard. She does justice to the high purpose of the family, and rescues the children from the epithet of "sad-faced" which the historian had chosen for them, wholly without warrant. If children were ever gay and wild, as well as industrious and inventive, they were the Alcott girls. Their education was never neglected, and perhaps the best part of it was the family perplexities, and the way they were endured and overcome. They had gloomy

hours, of course, and so do all children; but they had cheerfulness and courage for a firm foundation. In one of her early diaries, written at Concord in August, 1845, after the return from Fruitlands, Louisa, hardly thirteen years old, writes:

More people coming to live with us; I wish we could be together and no one else. I don't see who is to feed and clothe us all, when we are so poor now. I was very dismal, and then went out to walk, and made this poem:

DESPONDENCY

Silent and sad when all is glad,
And the earth is dressed in flowers;
When the gay birds sing till the forests ring,
As they rest in woodland bowers.

Oh, why these tears, and these idle fears,
For what may come tomorrow?
The birds find food from God so good,
And the flowers, — they know no sorrow.

If He clothes these, and the leafy trees,
Will he not cherish thee?

Why doubt His care? it is everywhere,—
Though the way me may not see.

Then why be sad when all is glad,
And the world is full of flowers?
With the gay birds sing! make life all Spring,
And smile through the darkest hours.

This is a genuine song, and I doubt not Louisa and Anna made the woods and the woodshed resound with it, at Concord, (the Wayside) after the family went there. Mrs. Clark, who copies this ditty, also gives, (and it is the gem of her little book, published at Lancaster by her son, J. C. L. Clark), a letter from Louisa to Sophia Gardner, a playmate at Still River, written September 23, 1845, a few weeks after the poem was written, when Mrs. Alcott had again gathered her family about her in Concord, and Mr. Lane was again her guest for a few weeks. What fixes the date is the final acquittal of Daniel Webster's client, Wyman, in the Concord courthouse in the summer of 1845, and the letters of Charles

Lane, quoted by Mr. Harland, and written from Concord in August and September of that year. Louisa, and perhaps Anna, had been visiting the Gardners in Still River, and the letter is addressed to Sophia G., now Mrs. Franklin Wyman of Worcester, after her return to "Hillside," as the Hawthorne place was then called. I correct a few errors of spelling and omission, and here copy, from the letter of a child not yet thirteen years old:

Concord, Tuesday, September 23rd, 1845.

Dear Sophia:

I had nothing to do, so I thought I would scribble a few lines to my dear Fire, as Abby [May] still calls you. I have just written a long letter to L— all myself, for mother is too busy and Anna too lazy. I suppose M. will scold if I call Anna lazy; but she is too lazy to do anything but drum on the Seraphine, till we are all stunned with her noise. I need not tell you we are all alive and kicking, — most of our family, that is: Miss Ford and S. are going away, so I shan't have to be fussed any more with them, — for Miss Ford is particular, and S. is cross. . . . I had a beautiful walk the other day with my governess

and the children to a pond called Flint's Pond; there we found lots of grapes and some lovely flowers. And now if you won't laugh I will tell you something, — if you will believe it, Miss Ford and all of us waded across it, — a great big pond a mile long and half a mile wide. We went splashing along, making the fishes run like mad before our big claws. When we got to the other side, we had a funny time getting on our shoes and unmentionables; and we came tumbling home all wet and muddy; but we were happy enough, for we came through the woods bawling and singing like crazy folks. Yesterday we went over a little way from our house in to some great big fields full of apple-trees, which we climbed, tearing our clothes off our backs, (luckily they were old) and breaking our bones, playing tag, and all sorts of strange things.

I go to school every day to Mr. Lane, but do not have half so good a time as I did at Miss Chase's school; the summer I went there was the happiest summer I ever spent in the country. There was such a lot of jolly girls to play and blab with, and we used to have such good times! though we did use to get mad now and then, it did not last long.

I went to court and heard William Wyman acquitted. I hopped right out of my seat when the foreman said "Not guilty." Poor Mr. Wyman! He

cried right out, he was so glad: his trial has lasted three years, and the poor man's hair has turned grey, though it was black at first, — they have plagued him so. What a silly fool I am to be talking to you about things you do not care about hearing, — so I will stop, . . . Our garden looks dreadful shabby, for father has been gone to New York for a long time, and Mr. Lane does not understand gardening very well. I must say good-bye now, for I must go and practise (music) for an hour, — so farewell. Mother sends her love to all the dear folks, and Anna lots to George. Bye-bye, dear childer, — the Lord bless you.

From your affectionate friend, Louisa.

Mrs. Clark rather smiles at Louisa's mention of her "governess," but that Miss Ford was, for the four Alcott girls in 1845, and there was perhaps another child or two. In Alcott's *Biographical Collections* is a page in print-hand, apparently drawn up by Mr. Lane, which shows an "Order of Indoor Duties for Children," and introduces Miss Ford as "in charge of Recreations and Chares," both forenoon and afternoon; and between 2 and 4 P. M. the girls had "Sewing,

Conversation and Reading with Mother and Miss Ford." The children were to rise at 5 A. M., bathe, breakfast at 6, studies with Mr. Lane from 9 to 10:30, then "housewifery" till 11, and then an hour with Mr. Alcott. Everything was mechanically arranged; the family dined at 12 and supped at 6; the children went to bed at 8:30, and had 8 1-2 hours for sleep. This arrangement seems to have begun in August, 1845, — the house and land having been bought with Mrs. Alcott's inheritance from her father, and some money furnished by Mr. Emerson, in the late winter. Writing to his brother Junius at Wolcott in early August, Alcott said:

Our repairs indoors are now nearly complete, and fencing, levelling and underpinning are in daily progress. The garden is now luxuriant and yields abundantly of melons, corn, squashes, beets, tomatoes, beans, carrots, turnips, and your favorite oyster-plant, which we are waiting for you to show us how to prepare for the table. This week I am designing to sow some rye: the buckwheat is now fast ripening for

our winter cakes: twelve or fourteen bushels of spring grain are awaiting the flail. Everything has prospered with our garden and improvements: I cannot pronounce like thrift in the human glebes and tenements. There is more of peace, I may say, and of faith and patience. But the house and inmates consecrated to the Spirit, and blest in union throughout, in every temper and design, — we yet hope for these. Who is he that has attained this hope?

LANE'S COMING AND GOING

This letter shows two things, — that Alcott himself had got far beyond the despair and doubt to which he yielded for a time, at the failure of Fruitlands; but also that all was not serene in the domestic sphere. In a long and prosy letter from Lane (February 20, 1845) then living in the Shaker Community at Harvard, replying to Mrs. Alcott's, inviting him to make one in their new Concord home, — Lane makes it evident, without saying so directly, that he has not wholly forgiven Alcott for the Fruitlands collapse, and still blames him for adhering to the "natural fami-

ly," and not showing himself ascetic enough. Mrs. Alcott had evidently written him that her own family and her husband's friend Emerson were uniting pecuniarily to give her a new foothold in Concord, on an estate of her own and Mr. Alcott's. To this information, and the invitation of rejoining his Concord friends, Lane replied:

If you have assumed that I must see your proposition as a progressive one for me, I may mention two (that I may call) private items, which would have to be cleared up in my mind, in addition to those over which I ought to hesitate, as well as any other proposed coöperator. Friend Emerson does not act nor profess to act wholly on universal grounds. Earnest devotion and unquenchable hope do not suggest his offering. Unless I am wrong, it is an act of the purest individual friendship. The rest of the outward means I understand to be still more private and individualized. I apprehend that this basis will vitiate and mar, if not entirely neutralize the good moral results that could not fail to arise in a building founded on the true rock. It is no worse than the old world, — but it is far behind Fruitlands, or this (Shaker) work. My resolution would be to live in

eaves and log huts, till we can build better dwellings, — and far away from all beloved associations, — rather than be entangled in modes which involve the very evils of which we seek to rid mankind. I know, many errors still cling here at the Shakers', but not that fatal one of property involvements with the old world.

Again:

He who is fittest for the spiritual sphere has best accomplished his duty in the natural sphere, — even in the judgment of the natural world itself. We are not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it; and fulfilling the law is the first step in the Gospel. This is the feeling of the United Society (Shakers) as expressed in its earliest conditions, — which I call, "The Steps to the Temple." Namely:

1. Pay all your just debts. 2. Right all your wrongs. 3. Confess and forsake your sins. 4. Give your hands to work, and 5. Your heart to God.

Thus you will perceive I am considerably impressed with your present hindrances.

Notwithstanding this quibbling, Lane left the Shakers for a time and went to try the experiment of rejoining the Alcott household, — the "natural family." He got

there early in August, but after five or six weeks he felt that he might be burdensome, and that Mrs. Alcott, though kind, wished to keep her family small. "Every one who comes," he wrote, the day after Louisa's letter just quoted, "though pressingly invited, soon develops the necessity for departure. Two out of three of us have gone, and I intend to exit as soon as Mr. Alcott returns." He did go back to the Shakers for a time, then to Boonton in New Jersey. In July, 1846, he again spent two or three days with the Alcotts, and reported that Alcott kept his garden clear of weeds, and Mrs. Alcott kept the house "clear of all intruders." After his return to England in September, 1846, all correspondence with the Alcotts ceased.

In Mrs. Cheney's Life of Miss Alcott, there is some confusion of dates, between Fruitlands and the resumed Concord existence, in 1844-45. At first, the returned family resided at Edmund Hosmer's, on the road to Lincoln, and not far from Flint's Pond,

which Miss Ford and her pupils waded; and it was while there that Louisa wrote, in January, 1845, the winter verses (which Mrs. Cheney quotes) and read Mrs. Child's *Philothea.* She said:

We have had a lovely day. All the trees were covered with ice, and it shone like diamonds or fairy palaces. I made a piece of poetry about Winter:

The stormy Winter's come at last,
With snow and rain and bitter blast;
Ponds and brooks are frozen o'er,—
We cannot sail there any more.

The little birds are flown away
To warmer climes than ours;
They'll come no more till gentle May
Calls them back with flowers.

O then the darling birds will sing
From their neat nests in the trees;
All creatures wake to welcome Spring,
And flowers dance in the breeze.

With patience wait till Winter's o'er,
And all lovely things return;
Of every season try the more
Some knowledge or virtue to learn.

Later in the year, and after getting into the Hillside house, one Thursday Louisa writes in her diary:

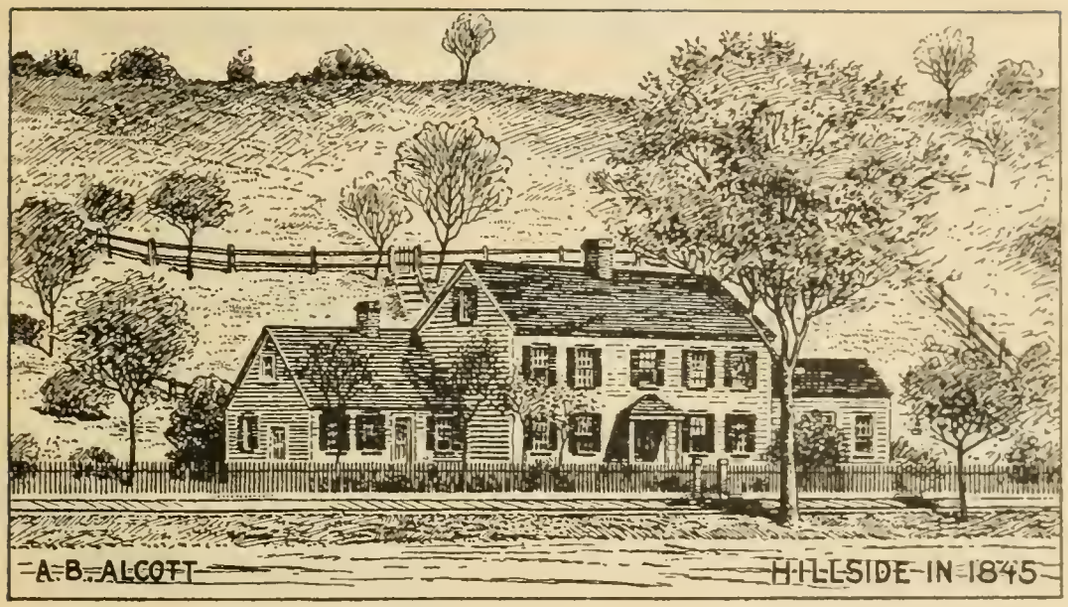
Miss Ford* gave us a botany lesson in the woods. I am always good there. In the evening she told us about the bones in our bodies, and how they get out of order. I must be careful of mine, I climb and run and jump so much.

Then in August, after Mr. Lane appeared at the Hillside house, he proclaimed himself "Socrates," nominated Louisa for "Alcibiades," and then we have this modern Athenian colloquy:

SOCRATES.

How can you get what you need?
How do you try?
How gain love?
What is gentleness?
Who has it?
Who means to have it?

*Miss Ford was not a resident of Concord except for a few years. She afterwards, (1847), had a small school of six girls in Mrs. Emerson's school room, and three of the six are still living in Concord. She was an admirer of Henry Thoreau, as few women were at that time.


A·B·ALCOTT
HILLSIDE IN 1845

Write a sentence about anything.

What are the elements of *hope?*

What are the elements of *wish?*

What is the difference between Faith and Hope?

What are the best kinds of self-denial?

Why use self-denial?

How shall we learn this self-denial?

What then do you mean to do?

ALCIBIADES.

By trying.

By resolution and perseverance.

By gentleness.

Kindness, patience and care for other people's feelings.

Father and Anna.

Louisa, if she can.

"I hope it will rain; the garden needs it."

Expectation, desire, faith.

Desire.

Faith can believe without seeing; Hope is not sure, but tries to have faith when it desires.

Of Appetite and Temper.

For the good of myself and others.

By resolving, and then trying *hard.*

To resolve and try.

Here, wrote Miss Alcott about 1885, "the record of these lessons ends. Poor little Alcibiades went to work and tried till fifty; but without any very great success, in spite of all the help Socrates and Plato gave her."

There was a certain truth in this confession. Like her mother, who was not included in the short list above, of those who had gentleness in 1845, Louisa had always to contend against certain infirmities of temper, from which her father (here called "Plato") was free. But she acquired that high faith which her father had, before she was thirteen, and this was her record of it:

> Concord, Thursday, October 30, 1845. I had an early run in the woods behind Hillside, before the dew was off the grass. The moss was like velvet, and as I ran under the arches of red and yellow leaves, I sang for joy, my heart was so bright, and the world so beautiful. I stopped at the end of the walk, and saw the sunshine out over the wide "Virginia Meadows." It seemed like going through a dark life or grave, into Heaven beyond. A very strange and solemn feeling came over me as I stood there, with no one near me, no sound but the rustle of the pines, and

the sun so glorious, as for me alone. It seemed as if I *felt* God as I never did before; and I prayed in my heart that I might keep that happy sense of nearness all my life.

Forty years later she wrote that she had so kept it; and that she "got religion" that October day in the sunny edge of her father's woods, looking out towards the "Virginia Road," on which her friend Thoreau was born, and the downs and meadows there adjacent. And one great and beneficent element in the long discipline of her life was the joys and sorrows of the Fruitlands episode in the romantic life-story of her poetic family.

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